

## The 20th Congress of the CCP Personnel Appointments and Policy Directions

Brødsgaard, Kjeld Erik; Beck, Kasper Ingeman

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# CHINA HORIZONS

DEALING WITH A RESURGENT CHINA

## The 20th Congress of the CCP: Personnel Appointments and Policy Directions

*By Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard\* and Kasper Ingeman Beck*

*January 2023*

*\*Corresponding author: [keb.egb@cbs.dk](mailto:keb.egb@cbs.dk). Department of International Economics, Government and Business (EGB), Copenhagen Business School*

## Contents

Key findings .....	- 3 -
Members of the Politburo Standing Committee .....	- 4 -
The New Politburo .....	- 8 -
Xi Jinping's People .....	- 11 -
Central Committee .....	- 11 -
Congress report .....	- 12 -
Amendments of Party Constitution .....	- 14 -

## Key findings

- The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was held in Beijing from 16 to 22 October 2022. The new Central Committee elected a new Standing Committee of the Politburo consisting of Xi Jinping, Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi, and elected Xi Jinping for a new five-year period as General Secretary of the CCP.
- The new Standing Committee consists of Xi's close work associates and former underlings. An average age of 65 makes it the oldest Standing Committee since the 1990s.
- The Youth League faction suffered a big defeat with the retirement of Li Keqiang and Wang Yang from the Party leadership and the removal of Hu Chunhua from the Politburo.
- 12 new members, all personally vetted and interviewed by Xi Jinping, were elected to the 24-member Politburo. New members include regional leaders such as the Party secretaries of Fujian (Yin Li), Shaanxi (Liu Guozhong), Shandong (Li Ganjie), Liaoning (Zhang Guoqing), Zhejiang (Yuan Jiajun), and Xinjiang (Ma Xingrui), as well as Beijing Mayor Chen Jining. Reshuffling of provincial leadership positions resulted in new Party secretary appointments in Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Tianjin, Fujian, and Guangdong.
- All four provincial-level cities in China (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing) are represented on the Politburo, indicating the continued importance of these megacities. The economic powerhouse of Guangdong and the strategically important Xinjiang also retained their seats on the Politburo.
- New Politburo members Ma Xingrui, Zhang Guoqing and Yuan Jiajun have a background in China's aerospace industry. The rise of the aerospace group or "cosmos club" in Chinese politics highlights the importance Xi Jinping places on innovation and strategic new industries, as well as the critical role of aerospace in Beijing's high-priority civil-military fusion strategy.
- New appointments to the Politburo show that the former rule of "67 down and 68 up" no longer applies to China's senior leaders.
- The new Central Committee is a highly educated group, with 98 percent holding a bachelor (benke) degree or above: 114 members have a science-based education and 121 studied business-related subjects. As with the Politburo, the Central Committee appears to be composed with a view of creating a pool of future leadership expertise capable of managing future challenges in high-priority development programs such as Made in China 2025, Internet+ and artificial intelligence.
- Xi Jinping's report at the Congress strongly criticized the Hu Jintao era and focused on Party-building and security as the keys to achieving political stability. Xi did not mention the Covid-19 crisis in China.
- Amendments to the Party Constitution were primarily about reinforcing Xi Jinping's authority over Party ideology, organization, and policymaking. There was neither an upgrade of "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" nor was Xi given any new designation as speculated prior to the Congress.

## Members of the Politburo Standing Committee

The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was held in Beijing from 16 to 22 October 2022. Leading up to the Congress, there was intense speculation concerning the new personnel line-up of the CCP's most important leadership bodies: the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. Xi Jinping's re-election to head the CCP was a foregone conclusion, but there was uncertainty about who would join him at the apex of the Party organization. Observers speculated about which principles and criteria would frame the election, as well as about which candidates would be chosen. The uncertainty involved both the names of candidates as well as the principles and criteria for election.

The Congress also featured Xi Jinping's report to the delegates and amendments to the Party Constitution (see sections below).

The day after the conclusion of the Party Congress, the new Central Committee met at its first

***It is, in fact, the oldest Standing Committee since the 1990s, indicating that there will be a substantial turnover in 2027 and that Xi Jinping's successor might not be found among the present members.***

plenary session and elected a new Standing Committee consisting of Xi Jinping, Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi. The Committee also elected Xi Jinping for a new five-year period as CCP general secretary.

The new line-up meant that four members were retired from the Standing Committee: Premier Li Keqiang, Chairman of the Political-Consultative Conference Wang Yang, Chairman of the National People's Congress Li Zhanshu and Executive Vice

Premier Han Zheng.

In terms of age, the members of the new Standing Committee are between 60 and 69. Ding Xuexiang is the youngest (60) and Xi Jinping the oldest (69). The average age of the new Standing Committee is 65, which is higher than the 62.9-year average for the Standing Committee elected at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 and the 63.4-year average for 2012 committee.<sup>i</sup> It is, in fact, the oldest Standing Committee since the 1990s, indicating that there will be a substantial turnover in 2027 and that Xi Jinping's successor might not be found among the present members.

In his capacity as general secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping (69) is still ranked number one. At the first plenary session of the new Central Committee, he was also re-elected chairman of the Central Military Commission. He is all set to be reappointed for another five years as president of the People's Republic of China at the forthcoming meeting of the National People's Congress in March 2023. He has packed the Standing Committee and the Politburo with close allies; he supervised the vetting process and personally interviewed all candidates.<sup>ii</sup>



**Table 1: Politburo Standing Committee, elected 27 October 2022**

Name	Position	Age
Xi Jinping	General secretary, president	69
Li Qiang	Party secretary, Shanghai	63
Zhao Leji	Head, Central Disciplinary & Inspection Commission	65
Wang Huning	Head, Party secretariat	67
Cai Qi	Party secretary, Beijing	66
Ding Xuexiang	Director, General Office of CCP Central Committee	60
Li Xi	Party secretary, Guangdong Province	66

Note: Position and age at the time of the 20th Party Congress, October 2022. Source: China Directory 2022. Tokyo: Radiopress Inc, 2022.

All other CCP factions have been excluded from the new Standing Committee. Many observers see the new leadership line-up as a good springboard for Xi should he decide to go for a fourth term as general secretary and president in 2027.

*He has packed the Standing Committee and the Politburo with close allies; he supervised the vetting process and personally interviewed all candidates.*

Li Qiang (63), the former Party secretary of Shanghai, is ranked number two in the Party hierarchy. It is a position that will secure his nomination to premier and successor to Li Keqiang at the forthcoming NPC meeting. He has a long career as a Party cadre in Zhejiang province, serving in positions such as Party secretary in the cities of Yongkang and Wenzhou. He also served as secretary general (chief of staff) of the Zhejiang Provincial Party committee and as secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Commission of Politics and Law (2011–12). As chief of staff for the provincial Party Committee, he worked for Xi Jinping during his tenure as Zhejiang Party secretary and was appointed governor of the province in 2013. In 2016, Li was transferred to neighboring Jiangsu Province, where he became Party secretary. Three years later, he was appointed Party secretary in Shanghai, where he was known for enjoying good relations with foreign business circles. He studied International Economics at the Central Party School in Beijing and holds an MBA from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He supported the establishment of a wholly foreign-owned Tesla factory in Shanghai – the largest of its kind outside the USA. But he is also known for Shanghai's brutal Covid lockdown in Spring 2022, which created strong local resentments. Having worked as Xi Jinping's head of office in Zhejiang, he is considered a close ally of the general secretary.

Zhao Leji (65) is ranked third among the seven-member Standing Committee, moving up from number six in the outgoing top leadership body. His high rank will undoubtedly secure his nomination as the new chairman of the National People's Congress when Li Zhanshu retires in March 2023. Like Li Qiang, he has solid provincial experience, having worked his way up the career ladder in Qinghai to become the province's governor and Party secretary. In the outgoing Standing Committee, he was appointed secretary of the Central Disciplinary and Inspection Committee, which coordinated and implemented the anti-corruption campaign initiated by Xi in 2012. Previously, he served as head of the important Central Organization Department, which is in charge of the nomenklatura and *bianzhi* systems and thereby manages the most important personnel appointments in the political-administrative system. Like Xi Jinping, he was a *gongnongbing* (worker-peasant-soldier) student in the late 1970s. While Xi studied chemical engineering at Tsinghua University, Zhao Leji took an undergraduate degree in philosophy at Peking University, and later attended graduate programs at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Central Party School. He is a pivotal member of the so-called Shaanxi clique, which strongly supports Xi Jinping. Xi worked in Shaanxi in his youth and his father held prominent positions in the province.

Wang Huning (67) has moved up from number five to number four in the Standing Committee and is expected to be nominated for chairman of the Political-Consultative Conference, when Wang Yang retires in Spring 2023. Although he has stepped down as director of the Central Policy Research Center, he is still involved in the Party's ideological and theoretical work. Before Jiang Zemin brought him to Beijing in 1995, he had been

**Wang Huning has served three general secretaries and is behind several key concepts, including Jiang Zemin's "three represents", Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" and Xi Jinping's "China dream".**

Professor of International Politics at Fudan University. He was a visiting scholar at the University of Iowa and later at the University of California at Berkeley (1988–1989). Upon his return to China, he wrote a book entitled *America versus America*, which describes the contradictions of the American political and socio-economic system and argues that the US is potentially heading towards a decline. He is known to promote the concept of "neo-authoritarianism" and supports the centralization of power in a strong Party-state. Wang Huning has served three general secretaries and is behind several key concepts, including Jiang Zemin's "three represents", Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" and Xi Jinping's "China dream". During Xi Jinping's second term, he

headed the Central Committee Secretariat, a position that has been taken over by Cai Qi. Wang Huning is now the only top leader without provincial political and administrative experience.

Cai Qi's (66) promotion to the Standing Committee took observers of Chinese politics by surprise. As the new head of the central secretariat, he is ranked number five in the power hierarchy. He has served as Party secretary in Beijing since 2017 and quickly gained a reputation for his efforts to clean up Beijing in a campaign that primarily targeted migrant settlements. Although Premier Li Keqiang opposed the campaign, Cai Qi continued to enjoy Xi Jinping's support. The two know each other from having worked together in Zhejiang province during Xi Jinping's tenure as governor and Party secretary. Officials who worked with Xi Jinping at this time are often described as members of the "New Zhijiang Army." The term *Zhijiang* refers to the Qiantang River, which runs through Zhejiang province, but is commonly used as a poetic reference for the greater Zhejiang region. Cai Qi is a leading

figure in the New Zhijiang Army; others include Li Qiang and Politburo members Chen Min'er and Huang Kunming. Cai Qi holds a PhD in economics from Fujian Normal University. Although an economist, he has been appointed head of the central secretariat rather than given an economic portfolio.

Ding Xuexiang (60) gained a seat in the Standing Committee, ranking number six among the seven members. He made a career in Shanghai, where he served in the Shanghai Research Institute of Materials and the Shanghai Municipal Science and Technology Commission before being appointed deputy director of the Organization Department of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee. In 2006, he was promoted to deputy secretary general (deputy

chief of staff) of the Shanghai Party Committee. During Xi Jinping's term as Shanghai Party secretary, Ding Xuexiang was further promoted to secretary general and tasked with assisting Xi Jinping in running the Shanghai Party organization. He gained Xi's trust and, when Xi became CCP general secretary in 2012, he was transferred to Beijing to serve as director of the Office of the General Secretary, becoming Xi's principal personal assistant (*mishu*). Concurrently, he worked as deputy director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee, which at the time was headed by Li Zhanshu. In 2017, when Li entered the Standing Committee and was appointed chairman of the NPC, Ding Xuexiang succeeded him. Although he does not belong to the New Zhijiang Army or the Shaanxi clique, he is another example of Xi's penchant of

**Although Ding does not belong to the New Zhijiang Army or the Shaanxi clique, he is another example of Xi's penchant of promoting close work associates and former underlings to top positions**

promoting close work associates and former underlings to top positions. Ding holds a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's degree in science and management. The master's degree was acquired via part-time studies. Ding's ranking as number six in the Party hierarchy indicates that he is positioned to assume the executive premier post when Han Zheng retires at the forthcoming NPC meeting in March 2023.

Li Xi (66) is the seventh and final member of the Standing Committee. He enters the top leadership body from a position as Party secretary of Guangdong province. He previously served as Party secretary in Liaoning province (2015–17) and deputy Party secretary in Shanghai (2013–14). His early political career was in Gansu Province, where he became secretary general (chief of staff) of the provincial Party committee before being transferred to Shaanxi Province in 2004. In Shaanxi, he was in 2006 appointed Party secretary of the Yan'an municipal Party committee. Given Yan'an's status in CCP historiography as the cradle of the Communist revolution, this position was of great importance to Li Xi's future career. It is also noteworthy that Xi Jinping's father, Xi Zhongxun, led the revolutionary uprising here in the early 1930s and Xi Jinping himself worked as a sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>iii</sup> Li Xi's background and extensive experience in Shaanxi enabled him to rise to prominence in the so-called Shaanxi clique. Members of the clique include Zhao Leji and outgoing NPC Chairman Li Zhanshu. Similar to Xi Jinping, Vice President Wang Qishan spent several Cultural Revolution years as a sent-down youth in Yan'an Prefecture and is closely affiliated with the group.<sup>iv</sup> Li Xi has an undergraduate education in Chinese language and literature and an MBA from the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua University. Similar to Ding Xuexiang and many others, he acquired his postgraduate degree via part-time studies. On 23 October 2022, Li Xi was appointed head of the CCP Central Disciplinary and Inspection Commission. It is noteworthy that during Xi Jinping's terms as CCP



general secretary, all heads of the Party's Central Disciplinary and Inspection Committee have been affiliated with the Shaanxi clique: Wang Qishan (2012–17); Zhao Leji (2017–22); and, since 2022, Li Xi.

Summing up, the new Standing Committee is composed of members who have worked closely with Xi Jinping and are considered loyal close allies. In terms of factional affiliations, all except two are members of the New Zhijiang Army or the Shaanxi clique. One exception, Ding Xuexiang, worked closely with Xi in Shanghai and Beijing. The other exception is Wang Huning who has proven his loyalty and value to Xi Jinping having served as his chief ideologue for the past ten years. All save one of the new members have solid province-level experience. This is especially the case for Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Cai Qi and Li Xi. Wang Huning is again the exception. All are well-educated and two boast PhD degrees (Xi and Cai Qi), although one can speculate about the quality of part-time studies for leaders in time-consuming leadership positions.

## The New Politburo

At the first plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, held on 23 October, 12 new members were elected to the Politburo. The average age of the new Politburo is 63.1, compared to 62.4 in 2017 and 61 in 2012. New members include a number of regional leaders, such as the Party secretaries of Fujian (Yin Li), Shaanxi (Liu Guozhong), Shandong (Li Ganjie), Liaoning (Zhang Guoqing), Zhejiang (Yuan Jiajun), Xinjiang (Ma Xingrui), as well as the mayor of Beijing (Chen Jining). Some were only recently appointed provincial leaders, and others had recently been transferred from leadership positions in other provinces. Ma Xingrui, for example, was in December 2021 promoted from governor in Guangdong Province to Party secretary in Xinjiang, and Zhang Guoqing was in September 2020 promoted from mayor of Tianjin to Party secretary in Liaoning Province.

*Wang Yi turned 69 a few days before the opening of the Party Congress, and his appointment to the Politburo shows that the rule of 67 down and 68 up no longer applies to Chinese senior leaders.*

Other new members include Shi Taifeng, president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Li Shulei, executive vice minister of the Central Propaganda Department; He Lifeng, minister of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC); Chen Wenqing, minister of State Security; He Weidong, general and commander of the Eastern Theater Command; and Wang Yi, minister of Foreign Affairs. Wang Yi turned 69 a few days before the opening of the Party Congress, and his appointment to the Politburo shows that the rule of 67 down and 68 up no longer applies to Chinese senior leaders. That the rule is no longer observed is even more apparent in relation to the re-appointment of Zhang Youxia, who turned 72 in July 2022, as general and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission.

**Table 2: Composition of the Politburo of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP (23 October 2022)**

Name	Age	Position
Xi Jinping	69	Secretary general, President, CMC Chair
Li Qiang	63	Shanghai Party secretary
Zhao Leji	65	Secretary of Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission
Wang Huning	67	First-ranked secretary of the CCP Central Secretariat
Cai Qi	66	Beijing Party secretary
Ding Xuxiang	60	Head of the General Office of CCP Central Committee
Li Xi	66	Guangdong Party secretary
Chen Jining*	58	Beijing mayor
Li Shulei*	58	Executive deputy director of CCP Central Propaganda Department
Li Hongzhong	66	Tianjin Party secretary
Huang Kunming	66	Director of CCP Central Propaganda Department
He Lifeng*	67	Minister of National Development and Reform Commission
Li Ganjie*	58	Shandong Party secretary
Ma Xingrui*	63	Xinjiang Party secretary
Yuan Jiajun*	60	Zhejiang Party secretary
Li Guozhong*	60	Shaanxi Party secretary
Yin Li*	60	Fujian Party secretary
Chen Wenqing*	62	Minister of State Security
Zhang Youxia	72	Vice chairman of Central Military Commission
He Weidong*	65	Commander of Eastern Theater Command
Zhang Guoqing*	58	Liaoning Party secretary
Chen Min'er	62	Chongqing Party secretary
Wang Yi*	69	Minister of Foreign Affairs
Shi Taifeng*	66	President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

\*New members. Source: Author's database and China Directory 2022. Note: Positions at the time of appointment. Politburo Standing Committee members in red shadow.

There has already been some reshuffling. Shi Taifeng has been appointed head of the CCP's United Front Department and member of the CCP's Central Secretariat; Chen Min'er has become Party secretary in Tianjin, with Yuan Jiajun taking his Chongqing post. Yin Li has left Fujian to become Party secretary in Beijing and his position has been filled by Zhou Zuyi, former minister of Human Resources and Social Security. Chen Jining has been transferred to Shanghai to replace Li Qiang. Liu Guozhong's position in Shaanxi is now held by Zhao Yide; Li Shulei has been promoted to head of the CCP Central Propaganda Department and his former boss, Huang Kunming, has replaced Li Xi in Guangdong province; Li Xi is a new member of the Central Secretariat. Despite these changes, all of these leaders retain their positions in the Politburo.

*Youth League faction has suffered a big defeat. The defeat is compounded by the fact that former Youth League leaders Li Keqiang and Wang Yang were removed from the Standing Committee.*

There are some interesting profiles among the new Politburo members. Yuan Jiajun has a background in China's aerospace industry serving as senior vice president of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASTC). In CASTC, Yuan was in charge of the Shenzhou manned space program and was one of the architects behind China's GPS system, Beidou. In 2011, he was suddenly transferred to Ningxia to serve as executive vice chairman of the province. Two years later, he was transferred to Zhejiang, where he became Party secretary in 2020. He turned Zhejiang into a testing ground for the Common Prosperity program, which Xi launched in late 2021. With his recent transfer to Chongqing, Yuan is in line to become a member of the Standing Committee in 2027. Yuan's former boss at CASTC, Ma Xingrui, left the company in 2013 to serve as vice minister of Science and Technology. After a few months, he was transferred to Guangdong and appointed governor of the province.

Yuan Jiajun and Ma Xingrui are two among many members of the rising aerospace group in Chinese politics. In the Politburo, the group also includes Zhang Guoqing, the former president of China North Industries and current Party secretary of Liaoning Province. Others with a background in aerospace are now prominent members of the Central Committee, such as Zhang Qingwei, former president of CASTC and current Party secretary of Hunan Province, and Huang Qiang, the governor of Sichuan Province and former president of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC). In fact, more than 20 members of the new Central Committee have had careers in the aerospace industry.

A notable absence from the new Politburo is Hu Chunhua. For the last five years he has served as an efficient vice premier under Li Keqiang and, as early as 2017, observers had expected him to gain a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee. However, he has now been demoted and it is difficult to see how he will be able to resume his career. With his removal from the top leadership, the Youth League faction has suffered a big defeat. The defeat is compounded by the fact that former Youth League leaders Li Keqiang and Wang Yang were removed from the Standing Committee even though they are the same age as newly appointed Cai Qi.

## Xi Jinping's People

Clearly, the Politburo and its Standing Committee are dominated by close allies of Xi Jinping. Whereas new appointments in the past had been based on a selection process involving consensus between the serving general secretary and former leaders, Xi Jinping personally vetted and interviewed all candidates for top Politburo positions. Now, Politburo members must refer to him directly and no longer, as in the past, to individual members of the Standing Committee according to the policy area (*xitong*) they covered.

Whereas the composition of the Standing Committee during the era of Hu Jintao and the era of Xi Jinping's first two terms reflected negotiated consensus among competing factions, the current standing committee only consists of Xi Jinping's people. The Shanghai faction is no longer represented, as Han Zheng has been retired and Wang Huning always was a wavering member. The Youth League is also out of the top leadership body and has lost much power, symbolized in the removal of Hu Jintao from the conference hall during the Party congress.

All four provincial-level cities in China – Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing – are still represented on the Politburo, indicating the importance of these megacities. The economic powerhouse of Guangdong and the strategically important Xinjiang also retained their Politburo seats. It is a new phenomenon that Liaoning is represented. With the personnel reshuffling after the Party Congress, Shaanxi, Fujian and Shandong are no longer represented in the Politburo.

Important central departments such as the Central Propaganda Department and the United Front Department are still represented in the Politburo, whereas the important Central Organizational Department (COD) has lost its seat. The current COD head is Chen Xi, Xi Jinping's roommate when he studied at Tsinghua University. It appears that Xi Jinping is reluctant to let him retire, although it is unusual that the serving minister of the COD is not a Politburo member. Xi will probably wait to change the leadership at the department until the new round of leadership appointments is announced at the forthcoming NPC meeting.

## Central Committee

The Party Congress elected a Central Committee consisting of 205 full members and 171 candidate members. The average age is 57.1, about the same as the previous Central Committee. It is a highly educated group, with 98 percent holding a college degree or above, defined as a BA (*benke*) or above. 114 members have an education in science and technology and 121 studied business-related subjects. As with the Politburo, the Central Committee appears to be composed with a view of creating a pool of expertise that can manage future challenges relating to high-priority development programs such as Made in China 2025, Internet+ and artificial intelligence.

As mentioned, more than 20 members can be categorized as part of the rising aerospace group. In the 1970s, many Party leaders had a background in the oil and gas sector, including Yu Qiuli, Kang Shien, and Gu Mu. They controlled the important central planning commissions and ministries at the center of the heavy-industrial policies under Mao and his successor Hua Guofeng.<sup>v</sup> During the 1990s, a new generation of the faction emerged, including Zhou Yongkang, He Guoqiang and Zeng Qinghong. However, the conviction and life imprisonment in 2014 of Zhou Yongkang during Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign was followed by a purge of many oil executives – including several promoted by Zhou Yongkang. As a result, the petroleum faction is no longer strongly represented at the Central Committee level and above.

Oil and gas is an old industry, embedded in a Soviet-style heavy-industrial central planning system established in the 1950s. China now focuses on strategic new industries such as aerospace and aviation. This is reflected in import statistics: China's chips and semiconductor imports are now worth more than US\$400 billion – double the value of energy imports. This is not sustainable given the tech war launched by the Biden administration, which forbids the export of advanced chips to China and strongly limits the use of American technology and equipment in producing the chips exported to China by Samsung and TSMC. China's government is keen to build indigenous capacity and therefore needs experts in the sector and associated new strategic industries. Moreover, high-profile leaders such as profiles such as Yuan Jiajun, Ma Xinrui and Zhang Qingwei have led national high-tech megaprojects such as China's Lunar Exploration Program and the Shenzhou manned space program, and have proved their leadership capabilities. The rise of the aerospace group or "cosmos club" in Chinese politics also highlights the importance Xi Jinping places on the key role of aerospace in Beijing's much-prioritized civil-military fusion strategy.<sup>vi</sup>

***The rise of the aerospace group or "cosmos club" in Chinese politics also highlights the importance Xi Jinping places on the key role of aerospace in Beijing's much-prioritized civil-military fusion strategy***

## Congress report

Xi Jinping's report to the Congress was considerably shorter than the one he delivered in 2017.<sup>vii</sup> It took him less than two hours to read the report, fully an hour less than his presentation five years ago. The speech contained strong criticism of the Hu Jintao era, which Xi characterized as dominated by "hollow and watered-down Party leadership," "acute structural and institutional problems" and "imbalanced and uncoordinated economic development." But since 2012, Xi continued, the situation has improved significantly, noting that China now accounts for 18.5 percent of world GDP and is the major trading partner for 140 countries. China has reached the goal of "moderate prosperity" and is now engaged in a new goal of "building a modern socialist country in all respects" by 2049.

The speech also focused on security, a term mentioned 91 times. The report gives an impression of a China under siege by hostile forces. Xi cautioned, "China must remain under high alert against systemic security risks." There is no doubt that the war in Ukraine plays a role



in Xi's evaluation of external security. However, he did not mention Russia's invasion in Ukraine. Instead, he warned that China's patience regarding Taiwan is running out.

Xi also did not mention the Covid-19 crisis. In Spring 2022, lockdowns were imposed in several Chinese cities as public health responses to new waves of Covid infections. Especially heavy-handed was the multi-week lockdown of Shanghai, which affected millions of Shanghai citizens who were restricted from leaving their homes and had difficulties getting food supplies and daily necessities. The economy was also affected, with many factories and workplaces closed or forced to work at reduced capacity. The economic growth rate – 8.1 percent in 2020 and 4.8 percent in 2021 – dropped to 0.4 percent in the second quarter of 2022. During the fall, there were new instances of locking down city districts or whole cities. A general fatigue and even dissatisfaction with Xi's handling of the Covid-situation was spreading in China. Yet, the report signaled that the government would continue its policy of zero Covid tolerance.

After the Party Congress, a sudden shift in policies resulted in the lifting of all restrictions and a reopening of Chinese society. The shift is not only caused by widespread demonstrations in Shanghai and other cities in November–December 2022. It had probably been underway since Autumn, under the impression of the impossibility of stopping the Omicron variant from spreading. The change was delayed because, it is impossible to introduce major policy changes during the run-up to a Party Congress, as stability must be maintained at all costs and no mistakes can be admitted.

According to Xi, security is crucial to political stability. Internally, political stability can only be achieved by upholding CCP leadership in all spheres. *Party-building* is the key word, and it

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implies that there must be Party cells in all social, political, cultural and economic organizations and institutions. Thus, there must be Party cells in all enterprises, including private enterprises and joint ventures. The Party is increasingly taking over state functions. A good example is the bureau for managing the civil service system, which used to be located in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security but in 2018 was transferred to the CCP's Central Organization Department. In a similar way, the CCP's Central Propaganda Department has taken over functions related to the control of TV, film and media which used to belong to the state.

At earlier Party congresses, the general secretary's report stressed the importance of economic development and reform. This was downplayed in Xi's 2022 report. The general secretary did not mention how and when to continue economic reform. The overall impression is a focus on political stability and security. Whether such a change of priorities can be maintained in a situation of economic stagnation remains to be seen.

## Amendments of Party Constitution

As is usual at Party congresses, the Party Constitution was amended. The amendments primarily were about reinforcing Xi Jinping's authority over Party ideology, organization and policy-making.<sup>viii</sup> Thus, statements on Xi Jinping's new ideas on the rule of law, whole-process people's democracy, national defense, armed forces, the united front and foreign affairs were included, as well as a new paragraph on "upholding Xi Jinping's core position in the Party Central Committee and the Party as a whole". Before the Party Congress, there were speculations that "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" would be shortened and upgraded to "Xi Jinping Thought," equating it with Mao Zedong Thought". However, this did not happen and Xi was not given any new designation.<sup>ix</sup>

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## Endnotes

- I. Kjeld Brødsgaard and Nis Høyrup Christensen, “The 19th Party Congress: Personnel Changes and Policy Guidelines,” *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2017), pp. 79–97.
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